

nonpartisan or bipartisan way to help save the people who are currently being damaged and hurt by the failures of ObamaCare but then to help us build something better, something more durable than what we have seen with ObamaCare.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Brand nomination?

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. KAINE) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 131 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Roberts
Burr	Hatch	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Cochran	Inhofe	Scott
Collins	Isakson	Shelby
Corker	Johnson	Strange
Cornyn	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Moran	Young
Ernst	Murkowski	
Fischer	Paul	

NAYS—46

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Peters
Bennet	Harris	Reed
Blumenthal	Hassan	Sanders
Booker	Heinrich	Schatz
Brown	Heitkamp	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Leahy	Tester
Casey	Manchin	Udall
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	McCaskey	Warner
Donnelly	Menendez	Warren
Duckworth	Merkley	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wyden
Feinstein	Murray	
Franken	Nelson	

NOT VOTING—2

Hirono Kaine

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will

be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Terry Branstad, of Iowa, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the People's Republic of China.

Mitch McConnell, Jeff Flake, Bob Corker, Roger F. Wicker, Cory Gardner, Marco Rubio, John Boozman, Pat Roberts, Joni Ernst, Mike Rounds, Todd Young, Rob Portman, John Thune, Chuck Grassley, Richard Burr, James M. Inhofe, John Cornyn.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Terry Branstad, of Iowa, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the People's Republic of China shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. KAINE) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 86, nays 12, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 132 Ex.]

YEAS—86

Alexander	Franken	Murray
Barrasso	Gardner	Nelson
Bennet	Graham	Paul
Blunt	Grassley	Perdue
Boozman	Hassan	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Reed
Cantwell	Heinrich	Risch
Capito	Heitkamp	Roberts
Cardin	Heller	Rounds
Carper	Hoeven	Rubio
Casey	Inhofe	Sasse
Cassidy	Isakson	Schatz
Cochran	Johnson	Scott
Collins	Kennedy	Shaheen
Coons	King	Shelby
Corker	Klobuchar	Strange
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Leahy	Tester
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Manchin	Tillis
Cruz	Markey	Toomey
Daines	McCain	Udall
Donnelly	McCaskey	Van Hollen
Durbin	McConnell	Warner
Enzi	Menendez	Whitehouse
Ernst	Merkley	Wicker
Feinstein	Moran	Wyden
Fischer	Murkowski	Young
Flake	Murphy	

NAYS—12

Baldwin	Duckworth	Sanders
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Schumer
Booker	Harris	Stabenow
Brown	Peters	Warren

NOT VOTING—2

Hirono Kaine

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 86, the nays are 12.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Terry Branstad, of Iowa, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the People's Republic of China.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the following nominations en bloc, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Todd Philip Haskell, of Florida, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of the Congo and Tulinabo Salama Mushingi, of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Senegal, and to serve concurrently and without additional compensation as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Haskell and Mushingi nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motions to reconsider are considered made laid upon the table en bloc and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 1185 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. HELLER. Thank you, Mr. President.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

I rise today to once again speak out against the administration's proposal

to revive Yucca Mountain. I know I have said it before, and I will say it again: Yucca Mountain is dead. Nevada will not be our Nation's nuclear waste dump.

I conveyed that message in my meeting with Secretary Perry during his confirmation and reiterated it ahead of his visit to Yucca in March. My former colleague, Senator Harry Reid, was a powerful and outspoken opponent of Yucca and worked hard to make sure the project did not see the light of day. Now I am standing between this administration and Yucca. I say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle that I will be leading this fight.

This is a reckless proposal. Over the last 30 years, the Federal Government wasted billions of taxpayer dollars to design and permit Yucca Mountain, all without any signal that Nevada would consent to it. A State without a single nuclear power plant should not have to shoulder the entire Nation's nuclear waste burden. We will not be run over by the desires of other States that want to move the nuclear waste that they produce, that they create out of their own backyards and then put it into ours.

I will say it again: Nevada will not be our Nation's nuclear waste dump.

Last week's accident at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington State serves as a chilling reminder of what Nevada could have to deal with at Yucca Mountain. I was relieved that no one was harmed after the tunnel collapsed but believe it serves as a wake-up call to my colleagues.

We need to find a viable solution to our Nation's nuclear waste problem. In addition to the potential tragic loss of life, radiation exposure resulting from a similar event at Yucca Mountain could shatter Nevada's economy. This is not to mention the threat of transportation accidents along the proposed waste transportation routes.

What this means is that under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, we are looking at shipping 9,495 rail casks in 2,800 trains, and 2,650 trucks hauling one case each to Yucca Mountain over the next 50 years. If the capacity limit at Yucca is more than doubled as has been discussed with the Department of Energy, we would shift 21,909 rail casks in about 6,700 trains and 5,025 truck casks to Yucca Mountain.

So I ask my colleagues: Do you really believe that over the span of the next 50 years there will not be a single transportation accident with an ensuing radiological release?

Under the DOE's proposal, these shipments would use 22,000 miles of railroads, 7,000 miles of highways crossing over 44 States and the Tribal lands of at least 30 Native American Tribes, the District of Columbia, and 960 counties with a population of about 175 million people.

Between 10 and 12 million people live within the radiological region of influence for route shipments; that is, within one-half mile of these rail and high-

way routes. In effect, these rail and highway routes would impact most of the Nation's congressional districts, estimated at 330 districts.

For those who are not familiar with the West or Nevada, access to rail corridors or highways is often difficult because they are in such remote locations. If there were a spill or an accident, questions remain within the Department of Energy regarding their response time for emergency radiological exposure. This is not to mention the issue of private ownership of rail rights-of-way, making it uncertain who would even control accident sites.

What we do know is that the local communities would be the ones forced to suffer any type of long-term effects of radiation exposure. This is in a State that was home to our Nation's nuclear test site and the surrounding communities, which have suffered for years from resulting exposure.

I ask my colleagues: Should Nevada be forced to once more to shoulder this burden?

Secretary Perry, in response to last week's accident, acknowledged our Nation's problem with nuclear waste, saying that the nation could no longer kick the can down the road.

I do not believe that our Nation should continue to kick the can—or in this case the cask—down the road. We must find a long-term viable solution to our Nation's nuclear waste problem, one that is rooted in a consent-based siting.

I stand ready to work with my colleagues to make sure States have a voice in this process. Failure to do so will serve only to make this problem worse, risking future accidents similar to what we saw last week.

We can no longer afford to look backward at the failed proposals of the past and waste even more taxpayer dollars. Instead, we need to move forward on a real solution to a very real problem.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, the most important words in our Constitution are the first three words "We the People," written in beautiful script and written many times larger than the rest of the document so that even if you are across the room, you know what this Constitution stands for—not a government by and for the powerful, not a government by and for the privileged, but as President Lincoln so eloquently said in his Gettysburg Address, a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

As a "we the people" nation, we adhere to a core set of principles that

have guided us through good times as well as in dark moments. One of those key principles is the rule of law, that we are a nation in which not only is there the rule of law but in which no one is above the law.

If we walked out of this Chamber right now, proceeded through the double doorways, and down the steps of the Capitol, we would be staring at the beautiful building of the Supreme Court. The entire building symbolizes the role of justice in our society. As you look at that magnificent Supreme Court—the broad, marble steps leading up to the door—you see these simple words inscribed above: "Equal justice under the law." It is right there. You can almost see it from where I am standing now: "Equal justice under the law." That is the principle that is part of the ethic of every courthouse in America—from the smallest, most rural courthouse to the big city courthouse square. We see those same principles personified as Lady Justice. There she is, holding the scales, blindfolded so as to make sure everyone is treated equally.

Yet, over the past few months, we have been in a period in which we have been staring into the abyss of a constitutional crisis because this very core principle of "no one is above the law" and "equal justice under the law" has been under assault.

We have a President whose campaign team is under investigation because of substantial information that suggests the possibility of coordination and collaboration with Russia to change the outcome of the Presidential election—an assault on one of the most fundamental premises of a free society; that of free and equal elections.

We have a President who gave code-word classified information to an adversary—Russia—just a few days ago. We have confidential information, we have secret information, and we have code-word information at the very top. These are the most sensitive secrets of the American Government, and our President gave that information to Russia. If anyone else did that, he would be facing criminal charges.

We have a President who sought to shut down an investigation into one of his former team members—retired LTG Michael Flynn. We know Lieutenant General Flynn was in contact with Russian officials, and he was fired for lying about it. President Trump fired the head of the FBI because he would not drop the investigation into General Flynn's Russian connections and conduct.

We have a President, President Trump, who asked his Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General to develop a cover story to tell the American people the reason he fired the Director of the FBI, which is that he was upset about the Director of the FBI's treatment of his former Presidential opponent, Hillary Clinton.

If anyone believes the President woke up in the middle of the night and

decided to fire the Director of the FBI because he was concerned about the way Hillary Clinton was treated, then you have not been paying attention this last year and a half.

Now, if in the course of an investigation it is found that members of the Trump campaign coordinated or collaborated with the Russians to undermine the integrity of our elections, then that is treasonous conduct. If the President asked for, encouraged, or knew about such activity, then he would be party to such treasonous conduct. If the President used his office to attempt to shut down either the investigation of Michael Flynn or the investigation into the collaboration between the Trump campaign and the Russians, then that obstruction is potentially a serious crime of obstruction of justice, and it has to be fully pursued. If the President fired his former FBI Director in order to slow down or shut down these investigations, then that compiles the evidence of obstruction of justice.

These sets of facts point to serious misconduct. We have to fully investigate whether there was, in fact, such misconduct. That is why, for more than 3 months—going back to February 15 and Michael Flynn's resignation—I have been calling for a special prosecutor to conduct a thorough, impartial investigation into these matters. Over these 3 months, the case for why we need an independent special prosecutor has only grown stronger with each new event, each new story, each new piece of evidence.

If there were any lingering doubt about the need for a special prosecutor, that doubt was washed away last week when President Trump fired Director Comey for pursuing the investigation into the ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. That is why many of my colleagues and countless Americans all across the country stood up and demanded that no nominee fill Director Comey's shoes unless a special prosecutor had been appointed. So I was very pleased when last night Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein appointed such a special prosecutor.

Now, he will be coming to this Chamber to speak with us in a short period of time, later this afternoon. But whatever else transpired, stepping up and appointing that special prosecutor was the right thing to do. He announced the appointment of former FBI Director Robert Mueller as special counsel—the words “special counsel” and “special prosecutor” are largely interchangeable—with wide-ranging authority to conduct a thorough and independent investigation into “any links and/or coordination between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump; and, any matters that arose or may arise from the investigation; and, any other matters within the scope of the investigation.”

Last night's announcement was a tremendous victory for justice—the

principle of justice. It was a tremendous victory for a country with the rule of law. It was a tremendous victory for the principle that no individual is above the law in the United States of America.

We need to have confidence that there will be a robust investigation to get to the truth, no matter where that leads us. Certainly, our confidence has been improved by the appointment of the special prosecutor last night—and not just any individual, but an individual qualified and respected to lead such an investigation.

For 12 years, from just before the September 11, 2001, attacks and right through 2013, this man, Robert Mueller, led the FBI. He led it for the second longest period in U.S. history. He led it for 2 years more than the standard term for the head of the FBI. He is known as a thorough, by-the-book prosecutor who can't be influenced or intimidated, and I have every faith that he will conduct a professional, robust, and thorough investigation and give the American people the answers to all of these issues.

But as we applaud this strong movement toward justice, to truth, and to accountability, this strong stride in support of our “we the people” democratic Republic, we cannot rest. We need to make sure that Mr. Mueller, as a special prosecutor, gets every resource he needs to aggressively pursue justice and the complete independence he needs to undertake this incredibly important task.

At the same time, we have to keep pressing here in the Senate, encouraging our Intelligence Committee, as well as the House Intelligence Committee, to aggressively pursue information. We cannot cede our obligation to represent and fight for the best interests of the American people or for our “we the people” Nation, and that includes speaking truth to power and holding our leaders accountable for their actions.

Mr. Mueller will have, as I noted, wide-ranging authority to conduct his investigation. His investigation and the investigation here in the Senate by the Senate Intelligence Committee will be looking at a number of connections that have occurred over the course of this last year and a half.

Now, we know a lot about what the Russians did to hack the American Presidential election. The intelligence community told us in a report this past January that, with “high confidence” Russian President Vladimir Putin “ordered and influenced the campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election” and that he did so in order to “undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate [Hillary] Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency.”

The report goes on to say that the Russian Government “aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.”

We know many of the elements of this aggressive Russian campaign. They used the resource “Russia Today” to spread fake news stories, to develop those stories, and to publicize those stories. They hired thousands of internet trolls to comment in social media on the affairs in America, as if they were Americans weighing in. They proceeded to hack the DNC, or the Democratic National Committee, files and the Clinton campaign files, and they released damaging documents from those hacks. They used bots; that is, remote computers instructed by code that was placed onto those computers to weigh in on social media as if they were people weighing in. So we had thousands of machines weighing in with comments as if they were individuals weighing in. Why did they do that? To take the fake news story and proceed to amplify it with comments from thousands of trolls and, probably, tens of thousands of bots, in order to get those issues trending so they would appear in the everyday news that Americans see. We are talking about a massive campaign of interference in the Presidential election.

What we need to know is whether anyone on the Trump campaign was connected, in any possible way, to these activities. To find that out, we have to investigate the growing web of connections between members of the Trump campaign and Russia.

Just consider some of the connections that have been explored already in the press. One individual is Carter Page, who served as President Trump's foreign policy adviser on the campaign trail. Mr. Page lived in Russia for 3 years while working for Merrill Lynch. He participated in several deals during his time there with Gazprom, the Kremlin-owned energy giant whose chairman was Vladimir Putin's deputy while Prime Minister.

He became friendly and emailed back and forth for months with Victor Podobnyy, a Russian spy who was recorded on tape saying he was trying to recruit Page.

Last year, while employed as a member of the Trump campaign, Mr. Page traveled to Moscow to deliver a speech bashing U.S. policy toward Russia, saying: “Washington and other Western powers have impeded potential progress through their often hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change.”

Then there is Paul Manafort, the former chairman of the President's campaign. He was hired to manage the Republican Convention and to wrangle delegates, but he was promoted to campaign chairman and chief strategist, until he resigned because of his questionable foreign dealings.

From 2004 until 2014, Manafort worked as an adviser to the Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian strongman who, over the years, adopted policies that moved his country away from the European

Union and closer to Russia. Manafort is regularly credited with helping Yanukovych win the Presidency in 2010.

In 2014, a revolution rose up against Yanukovych, and he was ousted from power. He now lives in exile in Russia. But Mr. Manafort continued working in Ukraine, helping rebrand the former President's Party of Regions as an opposition party, mostly from eastern Ukraine, which advocates for stronger relations with Russia.

Then, we have Roger Stone, President Trump's longtime ally, friend, and adviser since they first met back in 1979. That is three-plus decades. Ironically, it was Mr. Stone who introduced Donald Trump to former President Richard Nixon back in the 1980s, and there are stories in the media that Mr. Stone pressured the President to fire Director Comey.

Over the years, Mr. Stone has appeared many times in *Russia Today*, the Kremlin's English language news network that developed and publicized fake news stories during last year's Presidential election.

In his appearances, Mr. Stone regularly criticized the U.S. intelligence community, he attacked our media, he attacked our free press, he praised Russia and its policies, and he even praised WikiLeaks—the organization responsible for releasing massive amounts of confidential and damaging documents about our Nation's intelligence services and capabilities.

More than that, Mr. Stone has bragged about his communications with hackers—hackers like Guccifer 2.0. And who is Guccifer 2.0? The individual responsible for hacking the DNC and releasing emails during the campaign.

Another person whose connections to both the Trump campaign and Russia will be looked at is our former colleague and now our Attorney General. During the course of his confirmation hearings, Mr. Sessions misled fellow Senators about his interactions with Russian officials. When asked what he would do as Attorney General if he learned that anyone connected with the Trump campaign had communicated with the Russian Government, he said:

I'm not aware of any of those activities . . . I have been called a surrogate at a time or two in that campaign and I did not have communications with the Russians.

But he did have communications, meeting with Russian Ambassador Kislyak on two separate occasions last year.

Then, we have Michael Flynn, a very major part of the connections between the Trump campaign and Russia—a retired lieutenant general and appointed to be National Security Advisor by President Trump. He was intimately involved in the series of events that led us to yesterday, with the appointment of a special prosecutor.

Beginning in February 2016, General Flynn served as an adviser to the

Trump campaign, and he was even considered as a potential running mate for President Trump. As we know, he followed President Trump into the White House as National Security Advisor. But as I noted before, that role was short-lived, as his Russian connections came to light.

Back in 2015, he was paid to attend a 10th anniversary gala for Russian TV and sat at a table with Mr. Putin. He didn't disclose this on his security forms.

During the Trump administration's transition, he talked with Ambassador Kislyak by phone, including one call on the very day that President Obama ordered sanctions against Russia as punishment. Punishment for what? Punishment for interfering with the American election.

When that information was discovered, the White House contended that General Flynn's conversations with the Russian Ambassador were nothing more than ironing out logistics for an eventual call between the President and Vladimir Putin.

Even Vice President PENCE went on the record defending Flynn, telling CBS News that the two "did not discuss anything having to do with the United States' decision to expel diplomats or impose censure against Russia."

But General Flynn's conversation with the Ambassador was picked up during routine surveillance of the Russian Ambassador. And what were they discussing? They were discussing the sanctions President Obama was placing on Russia. Why did he place those sanctions? Because of Russian interference in the election.

Acting Attorney General Sally Yates made it known that she warned the White House that Flynn was lying to the Vice President and that he was compromised. She met twice with Dan McGahn, the White House Counsel, to warn him about Flynn. But in exchange for making sure the White House knew about the fact that the National Security Advisor was compromised and then lied to the Vice President, she was fired—fired by the President.

Eighteen days after Sally Yates' warning, Michael Flynn resigned, after the Washington Post revealed that he had, in fact, discussed sanctions with Ambassador Kislyak.

Now, according to his lawyer, "General Flynn certainly has a story to tell, and he very much wants to tell it."

Well, I hope, as the Senate Intelligence Committee and as the special prosecutor pursue the investigations, that he will have every chance to tell it and will tell it with a fullness and an accuracy that will be complete.

That is the web of visible connections we already know about, and they suggest the possibility of coordination, consultation, and collaboration with the Russians to influence the American elections. We have to get to the bottom of whether, in fact, that is the case.

Did it go beyond a series of conversations to actual coordination, consultation, and collaboration? This is what we need to know.

Now, the President says that there is no "there," there. That is why we need an investigation, in order to find out. The President has called this a witch hunt. An investigation, I would convey to President Trump, is not a witch hunt. An investigation is pursuit of the truth. An investigation is in the highest tradition of equal justice for all.

A very large development, as we all now know, occurred last week with the firing of FBI Director James Comey, who was leading the Bureau's investigation into these matters. Director Comey confirmed while testifying in the House on March 20 that the FBI was, in fact, conducting an investigation into Trump's campaign—something we now know really bothered the President. But at the outset, the President's White House claimed that Comey's firing was about the Director's handling of the Clinton email investigations, not because of the Russia investigation. That story on its face caused eyebrows to raise across the country. Did people really believe the President woke up and was determined to right a wrong because the FBI Director had unfairly treated Hillary Clinton? Yet he asked his team to develop this story to share it with the American people. He asked his team—his Attorney General and his Deputy Attorney General—to essentially put out a story to mislead the American people. That in itself deeply damages the integrity of the White House.

This cover story also claimed that Comey was fired because he lost the trust of the rank-and-file FBI agents. Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe came to the Hill to testify before the Intelligence Committee last week, and he conveyed that this is simply not true.

The cover story also involved Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein being the instigator of the firing by preparing this memo on his own and recommending it to the President. That also turned out to be a part of the deception, and the President himself made that clear, taking responsibility that it was his decision to fire, not a decision based on a recommendation that came from Rosenstein.

In an NBC News interview with Lester Holt, President Trump admitted that he "was going to fire regardless of recommendation" and that he was thinking of "this Russia thing," as he called it—"this Russia thing"—when he finally decided to fire the Director. He also told Lester Holt that he had asked Director Comey three times whether he himself was under investigation. The President admitted on camera to the American people that he fired the man in charge of the investigation against his campaign because he was frustrated that the investigation was still going on.

The American people received reports subsequently that the President

had asked Director Comey to pledge his loyalty to the President. This is news report of the memo that Director Comey wrote after meeting with the President. We find that the FBI Director is not going to be loyal to anyone but Lady Justice.

The President had the audacity to publicly threaten Director Comey after firing him. “James Comey,” said the President, “better hope there are no ‘tapes’ of our conversations before he starts leaking to the press!”

Attempting to intimidate future statements and possible statements in an investigation after a person has been fired is another factor that is totally inappropriate. Everyone with any shred of common sense knows such intimidation is inappropriate, but in the context of a criminal investigation, it may be more than inappropriate.

We don’t know if there actually were tapes. Our Intelligence Committee has requested the memos Director Comey wrote on his various conversations with the President. Remember, this is an experienced, seasoned FBI agent-turned-Director who has spent his life documenting conversations. It is considered to be a high level of integrity when such information is recorded in this fashion. Those memos carry a lot of weight. Some are classified, some are unclassified. They need to be provided immediately to the Senate Intelligence Committee, and if they aren’t provided, then the Intelligence Committee needs to subpoena them and needs to subpoena the tapes. If they exist, they need to be delivered. If they are not tapes but they are transcripts, they need to be delivered. If they are not tapes but a thumb drive or they exist on a piece of hardware, they need to be delivered, and our special prosecutor, Mr. Mueller, needs to have them as well.

I think that as one steps back from this incredible amount of information—the information about how Russia hacked the campaign, not just hacking into the DNC and Hillary Clinton’s campaign but then releasing that information in strategic moments; hiring a thousand individuals to comment in social media as if they were American citizens; establishing a botnet of computers to weigh in as if they were people to amplify this false social media, to get it trending and to get it into the mainstream news—when we consider all of this, we know how terribly wrong it was, and we have to learn every piece about what went on in order to make sure we are in the best prepared way to stop it from ever happening again.

We need to make sure we are in the best possible place to ensure that we can assist other democratic republics in making sure they are not victims of the Russians. We need to make sure that if any American, no matter who he or she is, collaborated or coordinated with the Russians in this effort to hack our campaigns, that they are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, our law enforcement officers and the families who support them give so much in service to our communities. As we were tragically reminded again last week—and this happens in far too many places, in far too many States—some make the ultimate sacrifice to keep us safe.

Last Friday in Kirkersville, OH, Police Chief Steve DiSario responded to a report of a man with a gun at a nursing home. Chief DiSario did what so many first responders do when most of us in the public run away from danger: He ran toward it. He arrived at the Pine Kirk Care Center to protect his community and was killed in the line of duty by a gunman who also took the lives of two nursing home employees. Chief DiSario was 36. He had six children and a seventh on the way.

Our thoughts and our prayers are with Chief DiSario’s family and the families of all of our first responders, who worry each day that their loved ones may not return home. Think about that. For soldiers, marines, sailors, police officers, and firefighters, so often when they kiss their spouse goodbye and go to work, there is always the anxiety at home. It is not just the sacrifice that our soldiers and our military personnel and our police officers make; it is the sacrifice their families make too.

Sadly, Police Chief DiSario wasn’t the only Ohio officer to lay down his life this year. In January, Officer David J. Fahey of the Cleveland Police Department was working the scene of an accident on I-90 and was struck and killed in a despicable act of hit-and-run.

This week in Washington, we honor the five Ohio officers killed in the line of duty last year. Aaron Christian of the Chesapeake Police Department was killed in a car accident while on patrol. While conducting traffic, Trooper Kenneth Velez of Elyria was killed by a driver under the influence of drugs. Officer Sean Johnson was the first officer to be killed in the line of duty in the town of Hilliard when he succumbed to injuries from a motorcycle accident during a training exercise. Officer Steven Smith was shot and killed during a SWAT standoff in Columbus. Officer Thomas Cottrell, Jr., of Danville was killed in a heinous and cowardly ambush. Each of these losses is a tragedy for a family, for a community, and for fellow police officers.

As we honor the work and sacrifices made by law enforcement throughout Police Week, we need to offer more than kind words; we need action to support law enforcement as they work to keep our communities safe.

Yesterday, I was talking to Police Chief Richard Biehl of Dayton and Youngstown Police Chief Robert Lees about what more we should do to support officers and their families. This

week, we have unanimously passed several pieces of bipartisan legislation that will provide new support to the officers who protect us and the families who sacrifice alongside them.

The Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Improvement Act, which Senator GRASSLEY introduced, will put pressure on the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the DOJ to speed up claims processing so families of disabled officers or fallen officers get their benefits more quickly.

We passed the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act, introduced by Indiana Senators DONNELLY and YOUNG, to help law enforcement agencies establish or enhance mental health services, like peer monitoring pilot programs and crisis hotlines, for their officers. I learned about this bill from my friend Jay McDonald from Marion, OH, whose advocacy for police officers and their families makes a huge difference for Ohio’s law enforcement communities. He has been the president of the Ohio Fraternal Order of Police for some time.

We approved Senator CORNYN’s American Law Enforcement Heroes Act of 2017, which would allow local police departments to use Federal grant money to hire veterans as law enforcement officers. It is a bipartisan, commonsense idea that would open new doors for those who served our communities and our Nation in the military and who have accrued and developed skills that will serve well their communities in police work.

We have a solemn obligation to the children of fallen officers whose lives are forever changed because of the heroism of their mother or father. The bipartisan Children of Fallen Heroes Scholarship Act—which I have introduced with Senators CASEY and DONNELLY, two Democrats, as well as two Republican Senators, TOOMEY and COLLINS—would increase access to Pell grants for the surviving children of law enforcement who lay down their lives for their communities. It would ensure that all children of fallen officers are eligible for the maximum Federal Pell grant. Of course, we can’t repay the debt we owe these families, but we can ease the burden on their children as they prepare for their future.

We need to do everything we can to ensure that officers and family members get the benefits and help they deserve. We also need to do more to give officers the tools they need to protect themselves. This week, I joined a group of Senators calling for full funding of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership.

I have written to the Department of Justice thanking them for their work so far and urging them to speed up distributing funding we passed as part of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. The bipartisan bill created the Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Grant Program to provide funding to police departments to train first responders as they deal with opioid-related incidents.

More and more officers are being exposed to fentanyl out in the field. Just this week in Eastern Ohio, an officer in East Liverpool was the victim of an accidental fentanyl overdose. He survived, but the situation was perilous. We need to make sure officers have the equipment they need to handle this deadly opioid look-alike—only more toxic—safely.

Our law enforcement officers put their lives on the line each day to protect us. This Police Week, we owe them more than gratitude; we must show support to the selfless men and women who serve our communities and country every single day, and we must support their actions, their lives, and their families.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to talk about the Russia questions that are on the minds of so many Americans. We had—I think, in the midst of all of the debate and controversy and genuine concern across the country—some good news yesterday when it was announced that Deputy Attorney General Rosenstein had made the decision to appoint a special counsel and, in this case, former FBI Director Mueller. That was good news because, No. 1, there was a special counsel who would undertake a review of these questions and in an independent fashion. I think people across not just Washington but even across the country were heartened by the fact that it was someone of the caliber, the experience, and the dedicated law enforcement commitment that Director Mueller demonstrated in his years with the FBI as Director, as a prosecutor. That was good news.

We are grateful for that. I know we will have a chance in a little while to talk to the Deputy Attorney General about these issues. I think we have to examine a couple more questions that arise.

So to review, on January 26, Acting Attorney General Sally Yates informed the Trump administration that General Flynn had apparently lied about having conversations with the Russian Ambassador, warning that it could open him up to blackmail. On May 8, Yates testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee and stated, contrary to claims by White House officials, that Flynn had discussed Russian sanc-

tions in his those conversations with the Russian Ambassador.

On January 27, President Trump hosted Director Comey at the White House, where the New York Times reported he asked Director Comey to pledge his loyalty. Director Comey reportedly promised only honesty.

On January 30, President Trump fired Acting Attorney General Yates, claiming her dismissal was over a matter unrelated to Russia.

On February 13, fully 18 days after the White House was originally informed by Yates of General Flynn's misconduct, General Flynn was relieved of his job after it became public that he lied about his conversations with the Russian Ambassador.

The day after General Flynn was pushed out, the President reportedly summoned Director Comey to a private meeting in which he took the extraordinary step of asking him to drop the FBI investigation into Flynn.

In March and again in May, Director Comey publicly confirmed that Trump associates were under investigation for possible coordination with Russia to interfere in the election. On May 9, President Trump fired Director Comey. His administration initially said it was based on a recommendation from Attorney General Sessions, who was supposed to be recused from anything to do with the Russia investigation, and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who reportedly had been asked by Director Comey just days earlier for additional funding for the Russia investigation. But then the President himself revealed he fired Director Comey explicitly because of the Russia investigation.

The day after, the President tweeted a veiled threat that Director Comey "better hope that there are no 'tapes'" of their conversation, raising the question of whether the President was surreptitiously recording his Oval Office meetings and whether tapes exist.

While it may be unrelated, it also bears mentioning that, this week, it was also reported that President Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian officials in a private Oval Office meeting—information that could jeopardize critical intelligence assets and risk undermining relationships with allies.

I think there are some serious questions, even with the special counsel who has been named, even with two Intelligence Committees reviewing these matters. I would hope that, in addition to those reviews that are being undertaken—those investigations—that we also have an independent commission to get all of the answers we need so that we can ensure the American people that this will never happen again—that no foreign government, in this case, a foreign adversary, can interfere in an election at any time in our future.

That guarantee will not be ironclad unless we know exactly what happened and why it happened, and then we take

a series of steps to prevent it from happening. We should be very clear with the Russian Federation that if they do this again, they will be sanctioned, and there will be a consequence in response to their actions. We won't be able to do any of that unless we find the answers.

Here are a couple of basic questions I hope would be a part of the deliberations, not just of the two committees or other committees that might review this but also the deliberations and work of the special counsel and his team.

The first question is, Why does the President believe that the Russian election interference investigation is baseless, which is contrary to the unanimous finding of 17 U.S. intelligence agencies? These agencies issued a "high confidence" assessment of the determination they made. That is a technical term in the intelligence circles that they don't use lightly.

Based upon the findings of those intelligence agencies and that finding being of high confidence, why does the President continue to question or even undermine that determination?

Question No. 2 is, Why did Attorney General Sessions, who had to recuse himself from the Russian investigation, weigh in on the firing of the FBI Director responsible for that very investigation? That is a question, I think, a number of people are asking.

Question No. 3 is, Can the Justice Department's political leaders—individuals who have just come in with this administration and officials in the Justice Department—be trusted not to interfere in the ongoing FBI investigation? That is a question.

Question No. 4 is, Why, immediately after firing Director Comey and amid the uproar about interference in the Russian investigation that it created, did the President convene a private meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister and the Russian Ambassador in the Oval Office and allow the Russian state media—the Soviet-era state media entity—to cover that meeting while keeping out the U.S. media? I think that is a question that a lot of people have.

Question No. 5 is, Why did the President reveal highly classified information to the Russian Federation, according to the reporting by the Washington Post and others, during this meeting with the Russian Foreign Minister and the Russian Ambassador, and what are the implications of that disclosure? That is something that we need to have answers to.

At least these five questions—you could add many more—are critically important questions. In some respects, there are even more urgent questions in front of us, and I will focus a little bit on those today—basically, three, I guess.

No. 1, did the President intentionally interfere with the ongoing FBI investigation into his associates, people that were on his campaign or on the campaign or working in the government now? The interference question

seems more likely than not based upon the reporting, but we have to know for sure, one way or the other: Did the President intentionally interfere with an ongoing FBI investigation?

No. 2, are any such efforts to interfere ongoing?

If the answer to the first question is yes—and we don't know for certain if it is question yes, but if it is yes—if there was intentional interference with the investigation by the President, the second question would be, Are there any such efforts to interfere that are ongoing?

No. 3, do they extend—meaning this potential alleged interference—past the FBI inquiry, to the investigations in the Senate and the House of Representatives? I think that is a question that is rather urgent as well.

Will this attempt to interfere, or alleged attempt to interfere, carry over into other investigations?

In essence now, we have three inquiries. One is the House Intelligence Committee, the other is the Senate Intelligence Committee, and the third would be Special Counsel Mueller's investigation. They are all critically important.

I would hope that we could add a fourth to that, which would be an independent commission, like the 9/11 Commission, where we came to definitive conclusions with regard to what happened on 9/11. Then, added to those conclusions, there were a series of recommendations so that we could prevent another 9/11. The same could be said here—that we want to make sure we get answers to these questions, have conclusions made, have accountability with regard to those conclusions, but then have a series of recommendations about how to prevent Russian interference or the interference of any foreign adversary in our election ever again.

Director Comey himself warned about the danger of undue influence on FBI investigations in an exchange during a May 3 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing. In this case, it was Senator HIRONO, a Democratic Senator from Hawaii, who asked if the Attorney General or senior Justice Department officials had ever ordered the FBI to halt an investigation.

Interestingly, here is what Director Comey replied to that question: "Not in my experience," meaning not in his experience does he know of an instance where the Justice Department officials interfered with an FBI investigation.

I will read it again.

Not in my experience. Because it would be a big deal to tell the FBI to stop doing something.

Then, he continues on, and it picks up with this:

[W]ithout an appropriate purpose. . . . a situation where we were told to stop something for a political reason, that would be a very big deal. It's not happened in my experience.

That is the now former FBI Director saying that there is no precedence for

the idea that the Justice Department would ask the FBI to take an action, which would be interference.

Director Comey was talking about the Department of Justice in this case—actions by the Department of Justice to interfere with an FBI investigation. In retrospect, perhaps a better question would have been whether the political interference he thought would be a "very big deal" might have been coming directly from the Oval Office. It is essential that we get to the bottom of this—a number of these questions.

An issue of this importance requires that the full investigative power of the Federal Government be brought to bear. The House and Senate Intel Committees are doing their investigation, as I said. The FBI investigation continues as well, despite concerns about independence in the wake of Director Comey's firing.

I hope, and I expect, that the next FBI Director will be someone who will be as independent, as capable, and as committed as Director Mueller is as the new special counsel.

We know there are dedicated professionals running these investigations. It has long been my belief that these extraordinary circumstances demand even more. I have been repeating for some time that we need a greater level of independence to insulate this critically important investigation from any suspicion of partisan interference. That is why I have been calling—for many weeks now, since early March—for a special counsel. I am glad the Justice Department now agrees with me.

Suffice it to say that we have a lot more work to do. Ultimately, this will be the work of everyone here, even if you are not a member of the Intel Committee or any other committee that is doing work that is directly relevant to this because, ultimately, the Congress has to take actions to get to the bottom of these questions but also be part of the process, at least, of imposing accountability and, also, especially the Congress is going to have to play a major role—the leading role—in making sure we put in place policies and procedures and laws that prevent this from ever happening again.

I hope the administration will join us in taking every step necessary to get to the bottom of these questions and to insist and to ensure that this never happens again to any American election. That is not just a goal, that has to be a guarantee as a result of this process. If the administration is not committed to that, I am not sure what they are committed to.

To take lightly or to ignore a problem that is this great and this serious, to undermine our democracy is, I think, to put at risk the very foundation of our Nation as a nation of laws and not of men, a nation that is committed to the rule of law.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the nomination of John Sullivan to be Deputy Secretary of State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination. The bill clerk read the nomination of John J. Sullivan, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of State.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of John J. Sullivan, of Maryland, to be Deputy Secretary of State.

Mitch McConnell, Cory Gardner, Tom Cotton, Roy Blunt, Jeff Flake, John Cornyn, John Barrasso, Ron Johnson, James E. Risch, Joni Ernst, John Thune, Mike Rounds, Orrin G. Hatch, Bob Corker, David Perdue, John Hoeven, James M. Inhofe.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume consideration of the Branstad nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, for purposes of today's votes, I want to announce that had I voted on Thursday,